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UNCLAS KATHMANDU 000064

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NEPAL: STUDENTS CONTINUE PROTESTS AGAINST THE KING

REF: A. 03 KATHMANDU 2507

1B. 03 KATHMANDU 2480

11. (SBU) Summary. Student demonstrations persisted for the 23rd day in Kathmandu, in certain instances turning violent. On January 7, police and students clashed in several locations, resulting in the injury of 8 students and 3 journalists. One student leader indicated that the protests would last until the government issues an apology for the December arrest of three student leaders for sedition, although those students were released on December 23. The political parties are certainly encouraging, and may perhaps be funding, the student demonstrations, which are expected to continue for the indefinite future. End Summary.

12. (SBU) Student demonstrations have occurred almost daily in Kathmandu since December 16, Black Flag Day, when three student leaders were arrested on sedition charges (Ref B). Although the student leaders were released on December 23 (Ref A), student unions continue to use the initial momentum to conduct public protests against "regression." (Note. Because Nepali law prohibits anyone from "causing hatred, malice or disrespect" against the King, the movement against "regression" focuses on the King's actions rather than the King himself. End Note.) According to police sources, the past 23 days of agitation have led to damage to property worth NRs 35 million (nearly USD 500,000) and the injury of 24 police personnel, 71 students, as well as 7 journalists. Press reports indicate that by-standers also have been injured by police. The demonstrations have caused daily traffic disturbances in central Kathmandu.

13. (SBU) On January 7, the Seven Students Union (the umbrella group for the student unions affiliated with the seven major political parties) decided to burn an "effigy of regression" in a mock funeral ceremony at a large public park in central Kathmandu. According to a central committee member of the CPN-UML student wing, the students attempted to prevent fire fighters from reaching the burning effigy, leading the police to use batons against the students. Police sources claim that the police only charged the students with batons after they began chanting slogans in favor of a republican state. At least 11 demonstrators (8 students and 3 journalists) were injured in the clash with three in critical condition. That same day, students also sought to march on the Royal Palace, provoking the police to fire three canisters of tear gas in an attempt to disperse the crowd. (Note. A standing directive by Kathmandu Municipality prohibits anyone from demonstrating near certain locations, such as the Palace and the Prime Minister's office. End Note.)

14. (SBU) Various human rights organizations, such as the Center for Human Rights and Democratic Studies, as well as the political parties have criticized the police for mishandling the demonstrations. Student union representatives have indicated that the protests will continue until the government apologizes for the December arrest of the three student leaders. On January 8 as of 1630 hours, between 700-800 students were demonstrating at various points throughout Kathmandu.

15. (SBU) Comment. The political parties are most certainly encouraging -- if not subsidizing -- the student union protests, which will likely continue until the political parties' coffers are emptied. Unfortunately, lack of proper civil disorder management equipment and training for the police exacerbates an already sensitive matter. The injury of innocent by-standers, journalists and protesters will only fan the flames of public discontent. End Comment.

MALINOWSKI